



NMAA holds entrance exam for next cadet course



Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Matthew Bates

More than 1,000 men from across Afghanistan prepare to take a written test as part of an entrance exam for the National Military Academy of Afghanistan. The academy will select 250 of the young men to attend its cadet course in February.

Over 1,000 Afghan men vie for 250 academy positions

Story by Air Force Staff Sgt. Matthew Bates
OSC-A Public Affairs

KABUL, Afghanistan – As the Afghan National Army continues to grow as a capable and credible fighting force, the need for trained and educated officers to lead it also increases. To find these officers, the National Military Academy of Afghanistan held a cadet entrance exam Nov. 7-10.

More than 1,000 Afghan men traveled to Kabul from as far south as

Kandahar, as far west as Herat and as far north as Nuristan to take the exam. Some were barefoot, some in short sleeves, others in dress slacks and silk shirts. Whatever the attire, though, each young man present had one thing in common – a strong desire to join the NMAA and become an officer in their country's national army.

The exam evaluated each applicant's physical fitness and physical health and tested his knowledge of general school subjects such as math and reading comprehension. The exam was conducted to determine which men will be selected to attend the NMAA cadet course in February, its second class since officially open-

ing this past February.

Cadets attend the academy for four years and are commissioned as second lieutenants in the Afghan National Army once they graduate.

“For Afghanistan, I would die,” said Ahmad Mirwize, a 23-year-old from the country's Paktya province.

Mirwize's sentiments mirrored those of the others on hand to take the exam. Aside from offering a chance at a steady paycheck, regular meals and relatively modern accommodations, the academy offers these young men the chance to show their national pride and love for their country as part of its military.

However, Mirwize and the others only have about a 25 percent chance

of realizing this dream. Of the more than 1,000 men who showed up to take part in the entrance exam, the academy will only choose 250 to attend the officer school.

To determine who would be selected, the academy organized a variety of physical and mental challenges designed to identify which applicants would make good officers in the ANA. The challenges were split into two days, with the first consisting of inprocessing and the completion of a physical fitness exam. On the second day, the applicants took a college entrance exam.

As each applicant arrived on the academy's grounds, he was inprocessed and given a number that became his identity for the next several days. Then, each applicant underwent a short interview with an NMAA officer who asked a series of 10 "yes" or "no" questions ranging from "Are you married?" to "Have you ever been in trouble with the law?" to "Are you willing to dedicate 10 years to the ANA once you graduate?" If an applicant answered each question with the appropriate response, he then wrote several sentences in Dari to show that he was able to read and write effectively.

As applicants were inprocessed and passed the initial interview process, they were grouped together and given a briefing about what to expect during the course of the physical fitness test and their time at the NMAA. When this briefing was over, the group marched to a soccer field and performed various stretching exercises.

The applicants next moved to the first stage of the physical exam – the push-up station. Here, eight men at a time performed as many push-ups as

they could. To ensure the Afghans performed each push-up correctly, a U.S. or Coalition military representative counted and recorded each applicant's number of push-ups.

"We're holding them accountable to consistent military standards during all of these events," said Army Maj. James Camel, a member of the Office of Security Cooperation–Afghanistan's NMAA Implementation Team. "So, just like in our boot camps

and officer schools, if they don't do something right, we don't count it."

If an Afghan had trouble understanding how to correctly perform the exercise, the military member

at his station would demonstrate the proper form to him, ensuring each participant was held to the same standard.

Once an applicant completed the push-up section, his score was recorded and he proceeded to the shuttle-run course. Here, he was required to run 300 meters as fast as possible in 50-meter increments. He ran 50 meters, touched a line on the ground, ran back to where he started, touched the line, and continued until he completed 300 meters. A U.S. or Coalition military advisor then recorded each applicant's time and ensured he ran the course appropriately.

The final portion of the physical exam consisted of a pull-up station where each Afghan performed as many dead-hang pull-ups as he could.

"Through it all, they all had smiles," said Sgt. 1st Class Joseph Bradbury, one of the U.S. advisers from OSC–A who helped with the event. "But for many of them, this was the first time they've ever done anything like push-ups or pull-ups or sprinted 300 meters.

But they're all here because they want to be, not because someone told them to, and that says a lot."

On the second day of the entrance exam, all of the applicants were required to complete a three-hour written test while sitting in an open courtyard. More than 1,000 men took the test simultaneously, marking an historic event in the progression of the nation.

"This is a really big step for the academy and for the ANA as a whole," said Army Lt. Col. Paul Lally, deputy team chief of the NMAA Implementation Team. "The training these men will receive here at the academy they'll be able to take with them and use to contribute to a military that will be disciplined, efficient and effective."

The NMAA will select the top 250 applicants based on a point system. Each applicant's score from his physical fitness exam will count toward 20 percent of his final score, while the points earned from the college entrance exam count toward 80 percent. By combining these scores, the NMAA hopes to choose the best qualified candidates to attend the officer school.

"The entire process was a great display of teamwork between the Afghan staff and faculty and the Coalition advisory teams," said Army Col. Dean Stodter, chief of the NMAA Implementation Team.

Results of the entrance examination should be known by the end of the month, and those selected to attend the academy will be notified shortly thereafter.

Hoping to trade their bare feet, silk shirts and traditional Afghan attire for an ANA uniform, the men who took the NMAA's entrance exam demonstrated that the spirit of Afghanistan is very much alive and that its people are not only glad to witness change, but very much want to be a part of it. 

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- Army Lt. Col. Paul Lally, deputy chief, NMAA Implementation Team



A group of Afghan men wait their turn to begin the physical fitness portion of the NMAA entrance exam with the hope that they will be selected to attend the academy and become second lieutenants in the Afghanistan National Army.



Photos by Air Force Staff Sgt. Matthew Bates

Applicants take the Concord Exam, a three-and-a-half hour written test in an open courtyard. This is the final portion of the NMAA's entrance exam.



Several applicants are interviewed by ANA officers to see if they have the desire and ability to attend the NMAA.



An Afghan man attempts to complete a dead-hang pull-up during the NMAA entrance exam. He was one of more than a 1,000 who competed for a spot to join the academy.